

Seattle City Council

Neighborhoods, Arts, & Civil Rights Committee Meeting

Friday, 2 PM, March 14, 2003

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Christopher J. Jarmick**

Today's Words' Worth poet is **David Thornbrugh**

David Thornbrugh is a "Ring of Fire Poet" who was born in Japan. David has worked as a drug counselor, often finds work as a technical writer and produces a monthly dance and spoken word performance piece with his wife Joan. He has been passionate about writing and obsessive about poetry for a very long time. He learned the power of words from Lenny Bruce, likes the Beats - particularly Kenneth Rexroth. David has lived in several U.S. cities and returned for a long stay in Japan in the 1980's. He's been a Seattle resident for 12 years. David's poetry has been published in a number of small press magazines including: Snow Monkey, Real Change, Roar Shock and he has been a part of PoetsWest quarterly Poetry presentations at the Frye Museum.

Skull Cup

By David Thornbrugh

Huffing up interminable stone steps
out of Pokhara, Nepal,
I didn't buy the human skull
lined with silver a Tibetan trader
offered among turquoise and red coral beads
coiled on writhing tree roots.
Crown of bone sawn off, pale
coconut consecrated to tantric altars

I was ignorant of, thumbprint
of some fierce deity flickering
among Himalayan clouds.
I almost bought

the strange fruit bowl but
distrusted the impulse, shock
for shock's sake, like the human skull

Mike kept his stock of psychedelics
in, selling dreams and ersatz revolution
from a San Francisco apartment
years ago. Respect kept the dead man's cranium
from my home, to hold coins or candy or
some other sign of my ignorance.
Now I wish I'd bought the dish

and brought it back to America to sit
on a strip of embroidered silk under
a tanka of Avalokiteshvara that hangs
over brass and stone statues of Gotama
Buddha, filled with dried rose petals,
chunks of frankincense, smooth white stones
gathered on a New Zealand beach.

Today blood pours from holes
blasted through a woman's head as she
opened her car door in Home Depot parking lot,
tenth victim of a sniper in Maryland,
tarot card killer with a single poison finger
that stretches from crimson oaks and elms
to touch the temples of a man pumping gas,
a schoolboy waiting for the bus.

I wish I had an extra cap of bone
to offer the victims
on an obscene altar that no one yet
knows the purpose of. I would give
away the silver lining of the Tibetan
ceremonial bowl if I owned such magic
as could thread the film back through the projector
and reverse the movie's ending,
replacing the jagged bits of scattered
bone back inside the head's red corsage,
dry up every drop of blood mixing
with oil on parking lot asphalt and
send it flying backwards into the exit
wound and seal the entrance,
make the bullet fly back into the barrel
of its gun to snuggle in its brass casket

again, but I can't,

I didn't buy the tantric magic
when I had the chance,
and now the clouds are bits of bone
composing a face too sad for lightning
to ever again illuminate, to ever
again hold rain enough to fill a hollowed-out skull
cupped between my trembling, begging hands.

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